

A BRIEF

ADDRESS,

CONCLUDING

THE CEREMONIES AT THE ANNIVERSARY MEETING

OF THE

WASHINGTON MEDICAL SOCIETY,

MARCH 12, 1829.

BY N. W. WORTHINGTON, M. D.

PRESIDENT OF THE SOCIETY, AND PROFESSOR OF MATERIA MEDICA IN THE
MEDICAL DEPARTMENT OF THE COLUMBIAN COLLEGE.

PUBLISHED BY REQUEST OF THE SOCIETY.

WASHINGTON, D. C.

PRINTED BY STEPHEN C. USTICK,

1829.

ADDRESS. &C.

Gentlemen of the Washington Medical Society :

By virtue of my station as President of this Society, the privilege of conferring the honors of the Institution on those members, who, having satisfied its requisitions, become entitled to the distinctions established by its laws, devolves upon me to-day. Standing here, therefore, as the accredited representative of the Association, I declare

J. Irwin Dunn, M. D.

Joseph McWilliams, M. D.

Benjamin F. Nourse, M. D.

James E. Stewart, M. D.

James M. Higgins, M. D.

Gonsalvo Hodges, M. D., and

Timothy Upham, M. D.

to be advanced from the situation of regular, or resident, to the more elevated distinction of honorary membership: In testimony whereof, the Diplomas, which are to be dispensed to them, are the interesting and appointed evidences.

[Each member received individually his Diploma, in the following words:]

Auctoritate mihi delegata, annuncio te socium honorarium Medicinæ consociationis Washingtoniensis, in fidemque cujus hoc tibi trado.

[This ceremony being over, the following Address was made to the newly created honorary members:]

GENTLEMEN: You have received the highest favor that your Brothers of the Washington Medical Society can bestow. A favor which, in conjunction with the honors conferred on you yesterday by the Medical Department of the Columbian College, constitutes an accession of distinction that, however valued now, will, in the revolution of successive years, become, if it be properly appreciated, still more dear, and far more

influential. The fond anticipation of pupilage ever has been, after the lapse of the probationary term, to enjoy an event analogous to the one which we celebrate to-day; it is the consummation of the youthful student's hopes to be invested with the cognizance of his preferment, and furnished with the testimonials of his matured character. With you the anxieties of adolescence have been dissipated, and the anticipations of maturing manhood are, in some measure, realized. The object of your wish, and of your efforts, is within your possession, and you are privileged to go forth as the legalized agents of health and happiness to mankind. To the Washington Medical Society this is a circumstance of great moment, for in connexion with the event is the ordinance which recognizes you to be delegated representatives of its best interests.

From the ample exposition of the circumstances involved in the history of the Society, together with the peculiarities connected with its membership, given by the Orator, *who has made the Annual Address on this interesting Anniversary, we discover that its institution was perfectly natural. Connected as were its founders with the Medical College, it was the dictate of good sense and sound policy to form an association by which the advantages of collegiate medical acquirements might be improved, the accession of medical information might be confirmed, and the acquisition of principles that give direction to professional conduct, and usefulness and dignity to professional character, might be established.

In the exercise of the duties incumbent upon you, as members of the Association, and in the enjoyment of the privileges which belong to its institutions, you have derived those advantages contemplated in its establishment, and on which the best hopes of the moral, intellectual, and medical character of the Society rest for interest and worth. You are now about to leave the Association. You are no more to participate in the im-

* Dr. James E. Stewart, one of the Class in the Medical Department of the Columbian College, who received, on the 11th of March, 1829, his Doctorate in Medicine, and according to the law of the Washington Medical Society became, as a member of this interesting Association, entitled to honorary membership on the day following.

mediate business of the Society; no longer to take a part in the contest of debate, or mingle in the collision of opinions liberally adduced, generously and judiciously sustained; but, unable to divest yourselves of the interest which you feel for things that can never die in your recollection, you leave, in departing, the mantle of your good wishes to those of your successors who are emulous for the welfare of science and the Society.

Receive, Gentlemen, in return, the reciprocal wish of good feeling, as the boon of those from whom you separate. Take it with you into the world, whither you are hastening. It will blend happily with other memorials of things, that will be cherished in memory as time passes away; it may even serve a better and a higher purpose, than merely to recall bygone scenes and pleasures; perchance, at some future period, a day of darkness and despondency, it may rise in remembrance as the solace of misfortune, the memento of former aspirations, the spirit-stirring influence of brighter hopes and better deeds.

Furnished with the knowledge of the general principles of the profession of your choice, you are about to take your stations in the world, and to offer yourselves to your Country in the responsible character of guardians of the health of her people. Such being the fact, and the relations which subsist between you and the Society being so peculiar, it will not be deemed a misapplication of the short time we shall still be together, to devote it to the consideration of one or two circumstances in the history of a youthful physician, which belong peculiarly to that period when he first commences his career of professional life.

It would appear not to be uncommon, inasmuch as it is so frequently the subject of notice, for a young man to think he has received all that is necessary for him, when he is released from the restraints of collegiate discipline. This notion is a most pernicious error. It is a sad misapprehension of the nature of the knowledge which he acquires during the periods of collegiate study; this is essentially rudimental, and so far from investing the student with the privilege of mastery over the sciences, it imposes upon him the obligation to extend their principles, to improve and render them more practically

useful. The votary of science, therefore, and especially of medical science, is always a student; never, at any time, can he relax from his efforts. Vicissitude is the order of nature. That, which was once science, becomes in the progress of days resolved into elements, and the history of the profession exhibits, conclusively, the unceasing modifications to which medical science is obnoxious. Whilst mutations are multiplying around him, how can the student of medicine be stationary? Had the Fathers of American medicine entertained this erroneous notion, we should, perhaps, have been still subject to the domination of our old masters. We might, it is true, have continued to read from their systems, and participated in the advantages of their improvements; might have been permitted the privilege of interpreting the tablets on the pillars of their temples: but it is certain we should have had no temples of our own, whither the youth of our country might go for instruction. We should have had no priesthood dedicated to the service of the temple, and devoted exclusively to the adaptation of the principles of medical science to the peculiar condition of our country and the circumstances of its people; no profession peculiarly American, conversant with our domestic medical literature and science, establishing the art upon the sure basis of observation and experience, and reciprocating the favors received from the profession of other nations. The history of medicine in the United States, however, shews, that there are temples rising in beautiful proportion, the depositories of science as pure, and of art as practically useful, as have adorned any age of the profession; that there are prophets whose characters illustrate the country of their birth, and whose names we may with pride associate with those which have distinguished the annals of ancient or modern times. From the thousands who have come among the sons of the prophets, some have not partaken of the spirit of their fathers. To them, however, belongs none of the glory which attaches to the medical history of the land; and from among them, no models are to be found worthy of imitation, either as it respects the learning or the manners of the physician. It behooves the student of medicine, therefore, not only to preserve sacredly the

attainments which he has, but to add to his knowledge wisdom, and to his wisdom virtue; to go on increasing the amount of his information, by the appropriation of every thing that is valuable from all the multiplied incidents of professional knowledge, which the revolution of time and the continuous operation of medical ingenuity and talents are constantly developing. Forward is the monitory prescription to the votary of medical science; and never in the annals of the profession was it more necessary for the votarist to be effectively diligent. All the departments of his art are now, in a great measure, opened out to his most zealous search; and wherever he may turn his inquiring gaze, objects of the most important interest are presented to his view. In the region of medical chemistry, for instance, discoveries are observable, which give brilliant indications of the progressive improvement of that important division; and it may be said, that even to note the changes in the materials and matters of the science which have resulted, and are likely to result, from the application of the principles developed by the refined researches of those powerful intellects, that have dignified this most interesting department of physical knowledge, would itself demand efforts and intelligence almost equivalent to those which effected the acquisition. In other departments, original and collateral, the improvements have been comparatively proportional; but especially in pathological anatomy have the best and highest interests of the science of medicine been most eminently advanced.

If the student be solicitous to acquire in the most rational way a knowledge of the subject of his studies, and if the practitioner be desirous to be furnished with the best data from which to construct a system of reasonable and just therapeutics, they will carefully apply themselves to the investigation of the inappreciably important truths which are afforded by the records of this department. If any man is to live in the remembrance of those who take an interest in his art, if any name gives interest to an era in medical science, will it not be that of Bichat? Where is the glory commensurate with that of having a man's name affixed to a period in the revolution of time? Does ambition ask for more

than this, that, in marking the annals of medical chronology, the period shall be denominated that of Rush—of Bichat?

A thorough knowledge of the principles and progressive improvement of the science of his profession is the first and indispensable requisite of the practitioner of medicine; but it is not all that is necessary for him to regard in the establishment of his professional character. The mere abstract knowledge of the science of medicine can give no great interest to its possessor. The practice of medicine is an executive business; its principles are things of use, and they would be comparatively nugatory, were they not properly and effectively employed.

It behooves the aspirant to professional confidence, therefore, to have his mind so disciplined, that he may at will put in requisition all his professional knowledge, and be enabled to make prompt and appropriate application of the various resources of his art.

This desirable qualification can come only by personal attendance on the diseased, by patient and watchful observation of all the diversified symptoms of the disorders which afflict mankind, and by careful and discriminating attention to the consequences of the various remediate measures, together with the effects of the different medicines employed for the relief of the sick. It is by clinical experience alone, that the right principles of medicine can be thoroughly understood, confirmed, and rendered effective.

A man fully in possession of the various knowledge of medicine, and having, also, the tact, the facility of application to which we refer, is, in a great measure, prepared to dispense obligations to his fellow men of the most valuable nature. But the dispensation of these benefits, the exercise of the medical profession in the way and for the object which was originally the cause of its existence, involves so many concomitant circumstances, including within its ample range not the learning of professional and collateral sciences only, but the wisdom of the knowledge of manners and of life also, that the importance and dignity of the medical character is intimately dependant upon the prudential combination and adjustment of these various particulars. The an-

cients, who saw every thing that addressed itself to their senses with the clear and perfect perception of natural unimpaired vision, impressed with the unequivocal advantages resulting from the art of medicine, said, that it came down from the gods: and it is no fancied circumstance that, through every period of the world, the character of the physician has been regarded, by men of reflection and genuine good sense, to be among those which are most worthy of esteem and veneration. Conversant with a science embracing a numerous series of human knowledge, and definitely among those which are most properly called liberal, practitioner of an art upon which he who employs it, giving as it were life to his fellow beings, depends himself for the supplies necessary to him, as the means of living, the character must be conformable to the diversity of its constituents, and it blends in its conformation science, wisdom, and pure morality.

How many thoughts gather in the mind as we make this interesting statement! How many things relative and personal, intellectual, moral, and professional are involved in its consideration! It would seem, that an ingenuous youth, educated in all the various knowledge which makes up the study of medicine, would have his nature liberalized and ennobled, his mind enlarged and refined, and, deeply sensible of the excellency of his art, would feel so great solicitude for its interests, as not only to be anxious for its improvement, but prepared and willing to vindicate it from deterioration, how or whence this may originate. Moreover, as he is made familiar with the infirmities and distresses of his fellow men, his heart would become more tender and generous, his affections warmer and kinder; and benevolence being as natural to him as the descent from its pure and elevated source is to the mountain stream, flowing down and fertilizing the vales below, he would diffuse in the friendliest manner the sweet charities of personal and professional services. Does the page of medical biography present any facts analogous to this imagination? Read it, and you will discover its brightest part not to be that which is ornamented by the display of great talents and professional distinction, but rather that, which

is beautified and embellished by generous impulse—by deeds of beneficence done for the interests of our fellow creatures. You will learn that a natural and inseparable connexion exists “between a man’s duty and his interest,” and become assured, that if, in the history of professional life, there be instances of wilful and flagrant neglect of the incumbent obligation of professional charity, the injured spirit of the art reproves the selfish churlishness, that resists the benignant influences of wisdom and humanity.

The duty of your profession is the care of the health of the sick ; and this is the main object for which you are to exercise it. With regard to those who are able to remunerate you for your services, it will be no more than a reciprocal interchange of obligation. But it is not so with relation to the sick and indigent. Penury added to distress, poverty to sickness, is the abundance in the poor man’s dwelling ; and the privilege of being the almoner of relief and sympathy to the miserable, is sacred in the bosom of the compassionate. To visit and relieve your sick brother, therefore, is your especial duty, and there is reason for the opinion that it will be for your peculiar interest. Though reward be not within the contemplation of the benevolent mind, whose charities are all bestowed for mercy’s sake, yet, it is undeniable, that even the most destitute can make some return ; the prayers and the praises of the benefited and grateful heart constitute a recompense most precious.

The chambers of the sick poor have been the fields from which the medical philosopher has reaped his most abundant harvest of clinical information. The families of the sick poor have been the powerful agents of advancement to fame and affluence, of the philanthropic dispenser of professional assistance.

You are to exercise your profession as a means of living. Having spent your patrimony in acquiring the knowledge necessary for the effectual performance of the duties of your business, you look for the restoration of it to repayment, from those who may require your services ; and truly “the laborer is worthy of his hire.” The liberal and just will pay you, and be thankful ; the ungenerous and the unjust will, in the time of their

health, forget the assistance afforded in the day of distress, and make no compensation, neither in the things that will buy the comforts of living, nor in those which, to the sensitive and conscious mind, are almost equivalent to more tangible remuneration. Moreover, many intermediate and variously diversified incidents, chequering the variegated existence of professional life, you will discover to be included in its multiplied history; and each day, as you advance in your career, will evolve some new incident indicative of the peculiarity of your situation. And with whatever disposition you may regard your profession, with whatever feeling you may enter on the exercise of it, and however inclined you may be to act conformably with the principles which belong to the true medical character, you will find it to demand a spirit of high moral excellence, to sustain you unbiased amidst the many perplexing circumstances, and temptations of various nature, in which you will be involved.

Alas! it is to be feared that many, unable or unwilling to bear up against the difficulties and disappointments incident to their new condition, have yielded to the allurements of an ignoble species of professional character, and, discarding the principle that science is necessary to the art, or that moral respectability and professional dignity are essential to medicine, have adopted the spirit of gain, as the basis of their medical character, and a cold-hearted selfishness, as the principle of their professional conduct.

If there be any interest in virtue, if there be any value in the profession of medicine, if there be any advantage in the integrity, the intelligence, and the influence of the character of a physician, it is of the highest moment that you attend faithfully and wisely to this matter. The spirit of gain becoming the principle by which the aspirant to professional favor and consequence is governed, amalgamates every nobler feeling with its base alloy. The spirit of gain becoming the sole impulse by which a young man is propelled, when entering on his professional life, he feels not, it is a "godlike privilege to save;" but, like the savage, he preys remorselessly on the relics of his immolated victims. Cultivate, therefore, a refined sense of the true nature of the medical

character, and be thoroughly conversant with the principles of professional intercourse. The idea that competition necessarily excites a malevolent spirit of rivalry among the members of the profession, is the most illiberal feeling that any man can entertain. Be assured an honest and ingenuous deportment towards your colleagues is not only becoming, but will be peculiarly advantageous. Independently of its eliciting sentiments of conciliation propitious to the improvement of professional intercourse and knowledge, it will also afford additional opportunity for the manifestation of practical skill, and the diffusion of medical reputation. He, therefore, who can descend to the dishonorable procedure of unfair imputation with respect to his professional brother, is unworthy the notice of any, who reverence virtue; and is, indeed, guilty of a suicidal act, with regard to the character which he himself disgraces.

Those persons who employ you as their physician are entitled to gratitude and respect, those especially who give you the opportunity to become known in the beginning of your career.

Do not, however, suffer the feelings of acknowledgment to obliterate from your minds the fact, that, in the dispensation of your professional services, you are exercising a profession which is based upon the principle of reciprocal obligation. Let not the desire to extend your practice so far influence your judgment, in relation to interest, as to cause you to undervalue comparatively your professional services, or to induce a mean deference for the opinions, or compliance with the caprices, of any, inconsistent with your professional self-respect.

The notion of patronage, viz. the patronage of individuals, being equivalent to the good opinion of the people generally, acquired by a faithful discharge of all the relative duties of the profession, is delusive. The best patronage is that of opportunity; and if the illusory feeling of reliance on the support of others, should so impose upon the aspirant as to displace the principle of independence from his mind, he must sink to a state of moral and professional degradation, where the integrity of the man, and the dignity of the physician, are lost in mendicant servility from motives of interest or gain.

End.